

Smoke Signals

Lhut Beh Nehudanih – They Told Us By Smoke

Volume 6, Issue 01



Sacho ooza' (sa-cho oo-za') ᑭᓂ ᐅᑕ (January)

Saik'uz Festive Flashback

A Look Back at the Warmth, Joy, and Community Traditions of our 2025 Holiday Season

New Year, New Growth & Honoring Our Strength

Reflecting on December's Achievements and Stepping into a Season of Stewardship and Tradition

Welcome to the team
Desiree, Renee and Rod!

Building Governance and Protecting the Land for 2026

Strengthening Our Sovereignty Through Land Stewardship, Traditional Governance, and Community Connection

The 2024-2025 Annual General Assembly is upcoming

Subcontracting Opportunities for Major Projects

New Year, New Growth & Honoring Our Strength

Hadih all, it is 2026! Happy New Year to you all. Some people say the new year is like a “fresh sheet of paper”. I think that at any point you can start with a “fresh sheet of paper” and do good things for yourself. My wishes for us all are personal growth, caring for self, nurturing all our children and lands, and a peacefulness within that is steadfast.

Chief & Council Updates

There is much council business with government agreements and being steadfast on land stewardship. I’ve witnessed work at provincial meetings where our lands team are vocal, speaking up for Saik’uz territory and our needs to protect and reconcile damages done.

Governance & Strategic Planning

Strategic Plan: We’ve selected a company to help create a strategic plan for Saik’uz. Over the next few months, council,

staff, and membership will have the opportunity to contribute ideas to create an overall strategic plan that will lay out a path for how we run business. Please keep your eyes open for space to participate.

Governance Manual:

In the development stages is the governance manual for Chief and Council. This will be a policy which outlines the duties of elected Chief and Council. There is a call for membership to participate in this working group now.

Please see “Call for Governance Manual Oversight Committee.” Questions can be directed to Lisa Krebs at 250-614-3168 or coordinator@krebsconsulting.ca.

Regional Collaboration:

Council meets with the District of Vanderhoof council quarterly. There is planning for the centennial celebration for Vanderhoof in 2026; keep your eyes open for ways to be involved and times of activities.

Education & Student Spotlights

We have many post-secondary students in many different education streams; it’s great to see all the learning. Education can open many doors and it can expand your mind. If you are interested in something, pursue it! Areas of study Saik’uz members are pursuing include:

- Social work, nursing, and psychology
- Engineering, arts, and science
- Vocal, counseling, and teaching
- Business, graphic design, and planning

It would be great to spotlight a student a month to share in their journey. If you are a student and would like to share who your family is, what you are studying, and what your future goals are, please do.

Community Events & Wellness

Healing Fire: Saik'uz hosted with Healing Fire in Prince George on Dec. 10th. So many Saik'uz staff were present to connect with the unhoused, feed and nourish people, and share.

Staff & Recreation: Staff wrapped up work with a luncheon on Dec. 19th. There was also a good turnout for the ball hockey tournament at the end of November.



Advocacy: I was invited to view a documentary, UNDUing Stigma, looking at street-level work for the safety and dignity of people living with addictions. It can now be viewed on YouTube.

Mental Health Support: If you are feeling low, reach



out and ask for help. Talk to a friend, a counselor, or check the health center for programs. Be gentle with yourself.

Personal Contributions & Activities

We had two groups of UBC and UVic med students stay with us in December. They helped with kindling making, wood stacking, shoveling, and baking. They also learned to bead moosehide Christmas ornaments and will be great doctors in a much-needed health system.

Winter Activity Idea: Ice Candles Me and the babies made ice candles! Steps to make ice candles:

1. Fill a balloon with water (add food coloring if you like).
2. Tie and leave outside for 6–8 hours.
3. Break the balloon, drain the liquid center, and place a tea light inside.





“Tsawyewh Ts’eelthis: Strength For All”

I was blessed to work on a project with UNBC and CSFS interviewing Elders. The resulting book, *Tsawyewh Ts’eelthis: Strength For All*, holds the stories of 37 Carrier and Sekani Elders. The book will be coming out in the fall, with a celebration in September 2026 at the CSFS Elders Conference.

This book is a testament to vibrancy and fortitude. It is a document for future generations to see themselves in and a gift to anyone wanting to honor the wondrous words and worlds of Carrier and Sekani Peoples.

In wellness,

Melanie Labatch





SAIK'UZ
FIRST
NATION

Annual General Assembly

**January
13th to 15th**

**Saik'uz
Band Office**

135 Joseph St, Vanderhoof, BC V0J 3A1



Call for Interest: Governance Manual Oversight Committee Members

Saik'uz First Nation is preparing a Governance Manual and forming an Oversight Committee to oversee the process from January through June 2026.

At this time, Saik'uz is seeking expressions of interest for community members interested in being on the Governance Manual Oversight Committee (GMOC). The GMOC's responsibilities include:

- **Attend 12 online evening meetings between January and June**
- **Review information and participate in discussion**
- **Oversee community engagement**

If you are interested in this role, please indicate:

- **Why you are interested**
- **If you are available for biweekly meetings (starting date TBD)**
- **Your contact information**

Contact Lisa Krebs by email coordinator@krebsconsulting.ca or call/text 250-614-3168 to express your interest in this role or if you need additional information.

Please submit your interest by January 15, 2026



Off-Reserve Christmas Party

Our recent Christmas parties in Prince George and at Saik'uz were a massive success! With a huge attendance at both locations, the days were packed with feasting, gift-giving, and holiday cheer. Community members enjoyed everything from door prizes to commemorative photo shoots, and had access to various interesting services. It was a joy to see so much laughter and connection. **We can look back on these moments as a perfect start to the winter season.**



Legend has it he's a reliable security officer during non-holidays



On-Reserve Christmas



Blue Christmas

It was also a time for us to slow down and acknowledge that it is okay not to feel festive. It is a quiet space for reflection, honouring our losses, and finding strength in each other.



Saik'uz Festive Flashback

Governance and Land & Resources Update

FIELD OPERATIONS AND MONITORS PROGRAM

The work of the environmental monitors and field crew in December included:

- Project management training and work planning for the upcoming year.
- Erik and Caleb participated in a moose and elk population survey flight over the territory, with a focus on the area between Prince George and Saik'uz.
- Participated in an Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance (UFFCA) meeting with presentations on fish stock assessment, and also a review of DFO's salmon allocation policy to update it to better support upper Fraser fisheries. Currently it focuses on the lower and mid-Fraser.

- James was busy supporting the organization of the Healing Fire in Prince George on December 10th – a big success!

- Erik and Caleb worked on predator management.

GOVERNANCE

Overview

We continue our work to gain back jurisdiction over our children and of co-managing and making decisions about our territory. Together, Elected Leadership with Traditional Governance are building a Saik'uz governance system with greater community involvement in decision making. The Clan meetings and Traditional Governance Oversight Committee (*TGOC – a group of Saik'uz family representatives, more details below*) are key to this work. We are in

the early stages, and we welcome community participation.

CLAN & BALHATS BOOK

Balhats Book

A big thanks to everyone who contributed to the Balhats book over the years, and for coming to the All Clans gathering in November to review and discuss the final items. The changes from All Clans have now been incorporated into the document and it will go to Council for endorsement early in January. We plan to do a community unveiling celebration once the printed copies are ready – stay tuned!

Julie George Balhats

Congratulations to the family and the Noolhk'ai Whut'en for the successful completion of the Funeral Balhats for the late Julie George on December 6th, 2025.



Tachek Whut'en workers at Julie George's Funeral Balhats.

Additional business included Tachek Whut'en members Warren Holmes and Bonnie Wisla getting sat down. Warren Holmes was sat down by John Holmes and Bonnie Wisla was sat down by Donna John.

TGOC & KEYOH MEETINGS

December Meeting Report

The TGOC meeting in December was a field trip to Prince George and the Two Rivers Art Gallery to visit the Too Beh Ts'ughuna exhibit. All the pieces in the exhibit were created by Lheidli T'enneh artists and included fish skin leather, carvings, paintings, bead work, textiles and photography – it was inspiring to witness the connection between art, culture, and land stewardship. Co-



Julie George's Balhats.

curator and Lheidli artist Kym Gouchie led us on a tour of the exhibit and shared stories about each of the art pieces.

The meeting also included approval of the new title for the Land Package. The new title is neyun ba ts'ukhuna – we live for our

land. Thank you to Karen Thomas and the elders for coming up with the title.

Thank you to TGOC members for attending, and for your participation and committee work in 2025!

Hunter's Forum February 3rd – 5th, 2025

There will be a Hunter's Forum held from February 3rd – 5th. The forum will focus on identifying values on the land, priority areas for protection and restoration, access for trails/cabins, and gathering input on hunting protocols from a Saik'uz perspective.

Contact Kelsey Antoine at the Band Office for more information:
250-567-9293.

About the TGOC

The Traditional Governance Oversight Committee (TGOC) is a group of Saik'uz family representatives who have knowledge of the traditional territory, Saik'uz peoples and our practices, and who are interested in participating and learning. The purpose of the TGOC is to bring traditional governance into practice and work with the elected government and Land and Resources department to support, offer guidance and provide traditional and current knowledge about Saik'uz territory.

We have sought input on who would like to join the committee as their family representative, and we continue to be open to your feedback. Please contact Amber Teed or Kelsey Antoine if you would like to know who your family representative is.



Fish skin leather artwork



Lheidli artist Kym Gouchie sharing with TGOC members.



SAIK'UZ
FIRST
NATION

EDUCATION DEPT PRESENTS

CULTURAL DAY

Jan 7, Jan 21
Feb 18, March 11 & March 25

3 pm - 7 pm | The Gathering Place
Saik'uz Band Office

Feb 6-7 (Snow Days) will be both an indoor and
outdoor event based at the band office.

Starts at 10 am - 3 pm

Cultural Activities

Light Meals

Everyone Welcome

Have Questions? Contact:

education@saikuz.com | 250-567-9293

Closing the Gap: Addressing the Chronic Absenteeism Crisis in BC Schools

Submitted by the Education, Employment & Training
Department | Data from FNEC

Student Attendance Data

As per the BC Tripartite Education Agreement (Schedule I, Section 2.2h), BC has committed to providing attendance data for First Nation students who attend BC public schools. BC has recently shared data on chronic student absenteeism, which is defined as the percentage of students who miss 10% or more of school. For most schools, a student who is chronically absent misses about 18 days within a school year.

Researchers note that students who are chronically absent generally experience negative impacts on student achievement and social and emotional development. The new BC data reveals that a large percentage of students are chronically absent.

Chronic Absenteeism in BC Public Schools (2024/25)
(Missing 10% or more of school)





Continued from previous page.

Support Strategies

Parents, caregivers, and families can:

- Keep track of their children's absences / monitor whether days away from school are adding up.
- Work with schools to communicate high expectations for attendance and academic achievement.
- Help make schools places students want to be.
- Make important contributions to school decision-making... including making school attendance policies and procedures work well for everyone.
- Build relationships with teachers and other school staff to support all students.
- Meet with school staff if children are experiencing attendance challenges.
- Contribute to school and community awareness efforts and incentive programs.
- There is a wealth of evidence that family involvement in education is invaluable for making schools safe, supportive, and engaging, where students feel welcome and valued.

Communities can:

- Have interdepartmental teams discuss comprehensive attendance supports, including wrap-around family services and shared efforts to get students to school.
- Help promote the importance of attendance at community events and gatherings, and help lead attendance promotion campaigns.

Students can:

- Be part of a school and/or community attendance team, imagining fun and innovative ways to encourage attendance.
- Join a Student Advisory Council, if possible.
- Encourage peers to come to school whenever possible.
- Support friends who have fallen behind in their school work so they don't avoid school.
- Let friends know they can be successful and graduate.
- Be a role model by coming to school regularly and on-time.



**Do you know of any stray kittens
or you need to surrender?
Give your new community
kitten rescue a call.**

Pawsitive Change Kitten Rescue is based in Saik'uz community for the community, our focus is to minimize the stray kitten and cat problem within Saik'uz and other Indigenous communities to provide a safe place for surrender.

We are also members of your local animal wellness committee. Reach out on Facebook, call or text 250-570-2659 or notify the Saik'uz Animal Wellness Committee



Happy Birthday

**Traften Teed • January 7th
Dana Daly • January 25th
Tyrone David • January 31st**

**Happy birthday Billy Joe
Johnny on January 9th.**

**Love,
Brandi, Ashlynn and
Morgan.**

Partner With Our Industries: Subcontracting Opportunities for Major Projects

by Saik'uz First Nation | Economic Development

Are you a local business owner or operator looking to grow your reach? We are currently building a comprehensive database of qualified subcontractors to share with our industry proponents and major project partners.

By joining this list, your business will be positioned for potential opportunities with some of the region's largest developments, including:

- Artemis Gold Blackwater Mine
- BC Hydro North Coast Transmission Line
- Coastal GasLink Compressor Stations
- Other nearby industrial developments

If you provide services in any of the following areas, we want to hear from you:

- Clearing and Vegetation Management
- Road Construction and Maintenance
- Equipment and Dump Truck Operations
- Building Construction and Trades
- Other Specialized Industrial Services

Submit Your Information

To be included in our directory, please email **edo@saikuz.com** with the following details:

First and Last Name, Phone Number, Email
Address, Type of Service(s) Offered



WELCOME TO THE TEAM!



Desiree Williams

Interim Executive Assistant to
the General Manager and Chief & Council.

Desiree is a proud Saik'uz member and brings valuable experience in administration, customer service, and organizational support from her previous roles in forestry and office settings.

Outside of work, **Desiree enjoys spending time with her family and being active in the community.** She's excited to serve the Nation in this new role and looks forward to connecting with members.



Renee Robinson

Administrative Support for O&M,
Housing, and HR.

Renee Robinson joined Saik'uz on December 1st, 2025. **She is happy to be returning to Saik'uz after ten years of roaming Vancouver Island, where she gained a variety of experiences and an awareness that provided her with a fulfillment of knowledge.** Now that it is time to return home, she looks forward to serving the Nation and sharing the knowledge she learned while she was away.

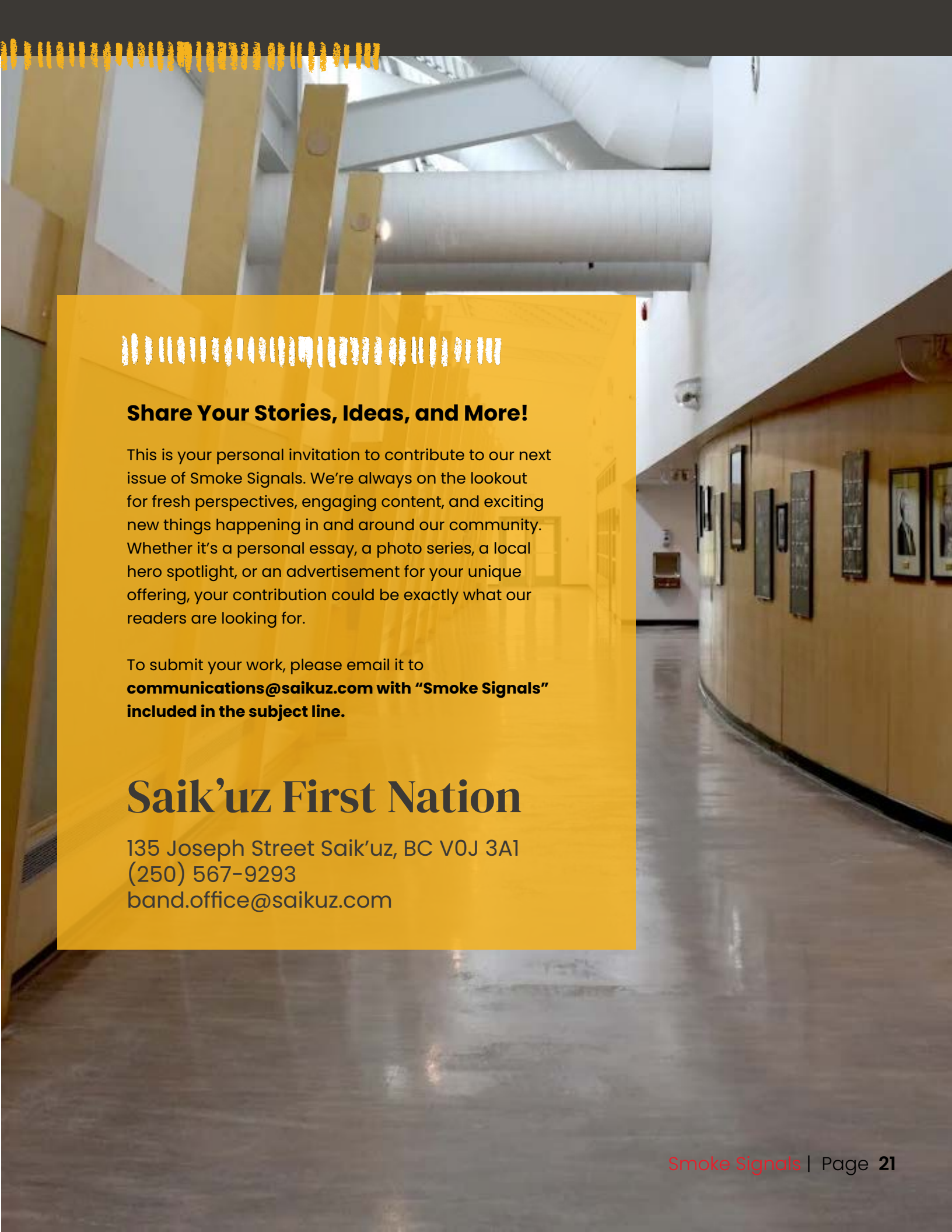


Rod Juanillo

Economic Development Assistant.

Rod Juanillo joins Saik'uz First Nation as the Economic Development Assistant, bringing a strong foundation in administrative work across government, social services, and public service settings. He is skilled in organization, coordination, and supporting complex projects, and values clarity, structure, and collaboration in his work.

Rod is excited to support the Economic Development team and contribute to meaningful initiatives that benefit the community. **He looks forward to learning, growing, and helping create a positive, efficient, and forward-thinking environment for both staff and partners.**



Share Your Stories, Ideas, and More!

This is your personal invitation to contribute to our next issue of Smoke Signals. We're always on the lookout for fresh perspectives, engaging content, and exciting new things happening in and around our community. Whether it's a personal essay, a photo series, a local hero spotlight, or an advertisement for your unique offering, your contribution could be exactly what our readers are looking for.

To submit your work, please email it to **communications@saikuz.com** with **"Smoke Signals"** included in the subject line.

Saik'uz First Nation

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